

Evaluation of Reading Activities for Second Years in the Faculty of International Tourism Management

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Evaluation of Reading Activities for Second Years in the Faculty of International Tourism Management

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Abstract

This year marks the opening year of the Faculty of International Tourism at Toyo University and from this year the English curriculum was changed. As part of a systematic curriculum review, this paper seeks to measure attitudes of second years (n=201) who took a new reading class with a speed reading course of 10 readings over the autumn semester. The speed reading activity itself is designed with easy words and grammar and focuses on having students read texts as fast as possible, but maintaining moderate comprehension rate. Along with student attitudes of this course, reading beliefs and habits were also measured with a view to improving future ITM courses.

Introduction

In the Faculty of International Tourism Management (ITM), a change in the English language curriculum has been brought about on the timing of changing from department to the status of a faculty. The first academic year of the new faculty is now over, and it is necessary to review the classes that make up the English curriculum to increase the quality and relevance of future instruction to faculty students.

Among the classes that will be reviewed is a second year reading class called Applied Reading. The purpose of this class is, firstly, to follow up on a first year reading class focusing on reading micro-skills, and secondly, to expose students to different types of reading genres on which readings skills could be applied. The basis for employing readings classes was related to recent scores on the TOEIC Test. Over the past few years, scores on the test's reading sections have been consistently lower than those for the listening section. There is little research which looks at this trend, but any situation that sees reading scores drop is cause for concern.

In compulsory English classes in the ITM, students are exposed to a number of different reading opportunities and techniques. In the first year, students follow a course using graded reading, in research referred to as extensive reading. The focus is on reading in high volume at an easy level for pleasure, rather than academic achievement (Day & Bamford, 2002). The other reading opportunity is a speed reading course that students undertake in the second year, which attempts to focus solely on the skill of reading quickly. The readings are produced with easy grammar and vocabulary for that reason (Quinn,

Nation & Millett, 2007).

Research in L2 reading has been varied, particularly in Japan, where older reading techniques are giving way to more communicative techniques in the classroom (Yamaoka, 2010). What perceptions students have of their learning environment can shape how they learn as well as support their motivation. Researchers like Williams and Burden (1987) have argued that a mismatch of perceptions related to how English should be taught between students and teacher students' may lead to a drop in satisfaction, along with student's motivation for language learning. Therefore, measurement of student's perceptions is healthy for the students and the curriculum.

This paper reports on a survey that is designed to not only gauge student attitudes towards the speed reading course, but also to survey students on their general reading habits for future curriculum decisions.

Importance of Reading in the L2

Reading is a very important skill to develop in English (Mckay, 1987). This is particularly true in Japan for attainment on important tests, including the Centre Test, the test for entering university. After entering University, reading skills help students improve scores on attainments tests, such those for the TOEIC Test. High scores lead to an advantage for job-hunting as employers base part of their decision on these scores. Indeed, according to ETS (ETS, 2012), the company that administers the TOEIC Test, 78% of Japanese companies state that a need for English proficiency has increased in the past three years and 81% of such companies believe this need will continue into the foreseeable future. This fact was supported by a study of English use in Japanese companies by Someya (2005) who found that 82.2% of the respondents feel that English is "absolutely" necessary in their workplace. Coupled with this fact is the understanding that most contact in business requires a primacy for reading skills. Again, Someya (2005) found respondents in his study believe that reading skills were more important than communication skills. This leads to the conclusion that reading is essential for business use in Japan and students should be trained to read in English before entering the workplace. .

The previous paragraph constitutes the extrinsic motivation for improving one's English. However, it would be sad to think that that is the only reason for students engaging in reading. Reading in one's native language is also a key to not only education and career, but also life. Reading allows us to feel pleasure, expand our horizons and even enrich peoples' lives (Inderjit, 2014). The same can be said for reading in a second language. Through reading for pleasure in the L2 at an appropriate level, the anxiety of the reader is lowered and can lead to people spending more time for reading for pleasure (Ujiie & Krashen, 2002). Therefore, positive experiences in reading while at university are crucial to academic and non-academic pursuits.

Reading classes at ITM

Along with regular class activities, ITM students undergo two forms of reading activities based on reading research. The first that students do is an extensive reading program in the first year. Students choose their own books at a level that suits them, and try to read as many of these books as possible. Although the focus is reading for pleasure, this form of reading has been shown to be very effective. Firstly, extensive reading has shown to improve reading habits and use of strategies for reading of Japanese EFL learners (Lemmer, 2010). It has also been shown to increase reading speed and comprehension among EFL learners (Bell, 2001), and finally extensive reading can also have a significant effect on EFL learner's motivation to read (Nishino, 2007; Takase, 2007).

The other main reading activity ITM students engage in is speed reading. The readings are set at the 1000-word level, with the comprehension goal at around 70%, meaning seven out of 10 questions answered correctly (Quinn, Nation & Millett, 2007). This is the optimum comprehension level at which students should aim for speed. Any comprehension level lower than this score, and the student would need to slow his or her reading speed, and conversely, scoring higher than 70% means the students may not be reading fast as they could be. The readings in the class are set at 550 words and 10 comprehension questions for the upper level, 450 word and 8 questions for the mid-level and 350 words and six comprehension questions for the lower level. The author created the 350-word and 450-word levels using the original 550-word texts and editing them down further, and simplifying grammar, where necessary. As well as editing the readings, two more readings designed by the author were added to the collection because some original readings were deemed to be inappropriate, and in some cases, uninteresting for Japanese students. Generally, the topics are related to Asia and the Pacific, so the new readings were created along these very general lines (Australian Aborigines and Gandhi).

In addressing research supporting speed reading, there might not be as much available as extensive reading, but generally it is positive. A study by Macalister (2010) found that ESL students in New Zealand who had completed a speed reading course saw gains in both the reading time of the speed readings and authentic texts towards the end of the course. Moving to the EFL context in Korea, Chung and Nation (2006) found that a large majority of university students on a speed reading course were able to gradually increase their speed over a nine-week course with 20 readings, and these gains were seen in the first ten texts, less so than the latter ten. Lastly, a study by Tran and Nation (2014) mirrored the results above with university English majors from Vietnam. As well as increases in reading speed and ability to transfer that speed to other texts, increases in language memory spans were also recorded. All the above, and other similar EFL research, finds the use of speed readings to be justified.

Methods

The students who took the survey were all second years coming to the end of the autumn semester 2017, after the ten speed readings had been assigned in class. A total of 201 surveys were collected in

class. The purposes were explained and it was further stated that the data were for research purposes and that students' decision to take the questionnaire was voluntary and would in no way affect students' grades. It took approximately five minutes for the participating students to fill out the questionnaire during class time.

Items used in the survey for this study were either created from scratch or borrowed and revised from other studies (Habtamu, 2016; Oktay & Dariyemez, 2014) to fit the situation in this paper. After creating a list of items, the authors and one Japanese teacher of English working at the same university translated the items from English to Japanese. A second Japanese teacher of English was shown the first draft and a check was made of the back translation. Where necessary, a few changes to the original were made.

There were five sections of the questionnaire with 16 items in total (English version can be seen in Appendix A). The first section contained two items that addressed what kind of things students read in English and Japanese.

The next remaining four sections held statements requiring students to specify a level of agreement (completely disagree, slightly disagree, somewhat agree and completely agree). In the second section was five items that dealt with attitudes toward the efficacy and enjoyment related to undertaking the speed readings course.

The next section had three items. These pertained to habits of readings in English. These were based on agreement of how often students carried out different types of reading activities in English

The next section has two items related to beliefs about readings in English. These items addressed the degree to which students felt that reading English was beneficial to them. The two statement were about how readings English could improve overall English ability and how well reading could support future career efforts.

The final section included four items about why students might not like reading in English. These included reason like having no time, a lack of interest and finding it too difficult.

Results and Discussion

The results section is divided into themes decided by the order in the questionnaire for three proficiency levels, according to the level of material students were readings. There were 67 students each in the lower and higher groups and 66 in the mid-level group, maintaining a level of comparability. Most of the results presented are separated into agreement or disagreement to show general trends. In other words, the combined total of somewhat and completely agree, and the corresponding two measures for disagreement will mainly be reported.

The first section can be seen in Table one, and deals with what reading activities the students do in both English and Japanese. The first point that is abundantly clear is that students read a lot less in English than they do in their first language, although the percentage of those that don't read in English is slightly lower for the mid- and higher level groups. Interestingly, the extra choices that students not choosing the main choices used were all related to social media. Next, all groups claim to read

Table 1. *Student Reading Activities in English and Japanese for Three Levels of Proficiency*

| | Lower level | | Mid-level | | Higher level | |
|-------------|-------------|---------|-----------|---------|--------------|---------|
| | In Jap. | In Eng. | In Jap. | In Eng. | In Jap. | In Eng. |
| Newspapers | 4% | 3% | 2% | 2% | 2% | 2% |
| Magazines | 32% | 4% | 26% | 3% | 26% | 3% |
| Manga | 31% | 0% | 29% | 0% | 29% | 0% |
| Non-fiction | 1% | 1% | 2% | 0% | 2% | 0% |
| Novels | 22% | 1% | 22% | 8% | 22% | 8% |
| Other | 0% | 7% | 8% | 8% | 8% | 8% |
| Don't read | 10% | 84% | 11% | 79% | 11% | 79% |

magazines, manga and novels the most in Japanese. These numbers show that there is a bias towards these types of materials, and students are less inclined to use a variety of different reading materials.

In the relevant research, Yamashita (2004) claimed that there were higher correlations between L1 and L2 reading for process-based research, namely research based more on qualitative than for product-based, which is based mainly on testing. Therefore, a higher reading skill in the L1 seems to point towards more competent L2 reading skills. Little difference between the groups in this study, coupled with the low instances of extra-curricular L2 English reading means that a conclusion about the effect L1 readings on L2 is inconclusive. However, at the very least, perhaps more reading material could be made available in English in the genre of magazines and Manga. Magazines with simplified text may be difficult to obtain, but on the other hand, translated versions of manga in English are widely available, and some researchers call for their use in intensive programs (Kumai & Ryan, 2007). Even though ITM is not given over to intensive classes because of curriculum scheduling, this could perhaps be an avenue for more proficient readers. For lower levels, graded readers have been found to increase motivation and lead to success in other skills such as speaking (Fijigaki, 2009). It is clear that ITM students need to be encouraged to read more widely, in L1 and L2.

The next section in Table two deals with perceptions of the speed readings course itself. Looking at what outcomes the students perceived they had gained from the speed readings, firstly, students in all groups perceived they mostly increased their reading speed (question three), and they perceived an ability to better understand the meaning of texts (question four). Both of these perceptions were experienced highest among students in the mid-level group compared to the other proficiency groups. The next question (five), showed that, promisingly, the students enjoyed the topics, particularly the mid- and higher levels who showed some form of agreement to the proposition at 93% or above. Following on, question six indicates that there is an increase in the degree to which students perceive the speed materials as easy as the level of proficiency increases. For example, 51% of the lower group showed some form of agreement that the materials are easy. That figure rose to 60% for the mid-level group and 70% for the higher level group. Lastly, in this section, students were asked whether they perceived if speed readings materials were more useful than those used in high school. The results were somewhat positive, with the higher proficiency group (77%) showing agreement of some kind that speed reading

Table 2. *Student Attitudes towards Speed Reading Course in English for Three Levels of Proficiency*

| | | Lower Level | Mid-Level | Higher Level |
|--|---------------------|-------------|-----------|--------------|
| Speed reading course made me read faster (3) | Completely Disagree | 2% | 2% | 0% |
| | Slightly Disagree | 27% | 8% | 19% |
| | Somewhat Agree | 61% | 67% | 72% |
| | Completely Agree | 10% | 23% | 9% |
| Speed reading course held understand reading better (4) | Completely Disagree | 1% | 2% | 0% |
| | Slightly Disagree | 30% | 13% | 28% |
| | Somewhat Agree | 56% | 67% | 64% |
| | Completely Agree | 13% | 18% | 8% |
| Enjoyed speed reading topics (5) | Completely Disagree | 0% | 2% | 0% |
| | Slightly Disagree | 20% | 5% | 6% |
| | Somewhat Agree | 61% | 64% | 60% |
| | Completely Agree | 19% | 29% | 34% |
| Speed reading materials was quite easy (6) | Completely Disagree | 6% | 2% | 0% |
| | Slightly Disagree | 43% | 38% | 30% |
| | Somewhat Agree | 42% | 55% | 57% |
| | Completely Agree | 9% | 5% | 13% |
| Speed reading materials more useful than high school (7) | Completely Disagree | 12% | 3% | 1% |
| | Slightly Disagree | 27% | 35% | 22% |
| | Somewhat Agree | 48% | 44% | 50% |
| | Completely Agree | 13% | 18% | 27% |

materials are more useful than the lower level (61%) and mid-level (64%) groups.

All of the groups were positive in general about the speed reading. It could be said, however, that those who do not read outside of class for pleasure will not see as many gains as those that do. Reading of this nature is cyclical, in that the more a student reads the better they can read, and the more they eventually do read. The next step is to actually measure what gains in speed and comprehension were made in the speed reading course, or whether students simply enjoyed the readings.

For the topics of these readings, it could be said there is a small degree of familiarity as they are Asian-based, but this effect might not be strong. The research shows that topic familiarity can improve learning and vocabulary retention in text (Horiba & Fukuya 2015). As these texts are set at a low vocabulary level, reducing the length of the texts and their questions for varying proficiency level groups appears to have made the materials suitable for all the groups

In the third section in Table three, students are asked about their reading habits. As shown in question two, there is much disagreement that students read for pleasure, with all groups signaling over 95% for reading for pleasure often (question eight). Slightly higher than reading for pleasure, but still low in agreement was question nine, showing that most students disagreed to using TOEIC reading practice as a self-study option. All groups disagreed to this at around 86%. Lastly, in this section, and again confirming the lack of reading in English, students disagreed to reading graded readers without being asked to. For this item, agreement for the lower groups was 6%, 11% for mid-level and climbing to 30%

Table 3. *Student Reading Habits in English for Three Levels of Proficiency*

| | | Lower Level | Mid-Level | Higher Level |
|--|---------------------|-------------|-----------|--------------|
| Often read for pleasure (8) | Completely Disagree | 78% | 84% | 58% |
| | Slightly Disagree | 18% | 11% | 39% |
| | Somewhat Agree | 1% | 3% | 3% |
| | Completely Agree | 3% | 2% | 0% |
| Often reads / try TOEIC reading practice by myself (9) | Completely Disagree | 56% | 45% | 28% |
| | Slightly Disagree | 30% | 42% | 55% |
| | Somewhat Agree | 10% | 11% | 13% |
| | Completely Agree | 4% | 2% | 3% |
| Often read graded readers with being asked to (10) | Completely Disagree | 75% | 63% | 42% |
| | Slightly Disagree | 19% | 26% | 28% |
| | Somewhat Agree | 3% | 11% | 24% |
| | Completely Agree | 3% | 0% | 6% |

for the higher group.

In a recent study of ITM students Robson and Hardy (2018) found that there was limited student action related to out-of-class activities, but that some students attested to undertaking out-of-class activities such as listening to music and watching movies in English. However, students were motivated to do out-of-class activities if they thought it could improve English (Hardy (2017). It is clear, however, that rather than in the purest form of autonomy as espoused in the West, Littlewood's (1999) concept of reactive autonomy is prevalent, in which the guidelines for out-of-class learning must be set before students take action. As expected the higher proficiency groups in this study report more out-of-class reading activities, but it is important for all groups to read as much as possible at a suitable level in order for students to improve reading skills.

In the section after habits comes beliefs about reading with two items in Table four. Both of these items address perceptions of the utility of reading in English. The first item (question 11) showed a very high level of agreement for reading improving overall English, particularly for the higher level groups who agreed to 99%, with mid-level at a comparable 98%, and the lower level groups somewhat behind at 88%. The other item (question 12) dealt with English for utility of students' future careers. Again,

Table 4. *Student Beliefs about Reading in English for Three Levels of Proficiency*

| | | Lower Level | Mid-Level | Higher Level |
|---|---------------------|-------------|-----------|--------------|
| Reading can improve my overall English ability (11) | Completely Disagree | 3% | 0% | 0% |
| | Slightly Disagree | 9% | 2% | 1% |
| | Somewhat Agree | 49% | 42% | 40% |
| | Completely Agree | 39% | 56% | 59% |
| Reading English well can support future career (12) | Completely Disagree | 3% | 3% | 0% |
| | Slightly Disagree | 9% | 3% | 9% |
| | Somewhat Agree | 43% | 38% | 36% |
| | Completely Agree | 45% | 56% | 55% |

students displayed high agreement to this item, with all 88% or above.

Both of these items suggest that students are driven by extrinsic goals, or those connected with a reward or beneficial outcome (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Japan as a society places high emphasis on the company one works for, which is dependent to some extent on the university graduated from and one's attainment on tests like the TOEIC Test. As long as students continue to believe that reading will be beneficial for their English ability and, ultimately, their careers, there is a strong motivational base to act as a self-motivating source for reading. Generally, the higher levels seem to have a higher level of extrinsic-orientated beliefs. However, research in Japan has shown extensive reading can lead to higher intrinsic motivation in higher-level students, whereas lower-level students are more extrinsically motivated by extensive reading (Fujiuta & Noro, 2009). It is clear that different reading activities can produce different types of motivation.

The last section in Table five deals with why students don't read much in English. For question 13, there was mostly agreement for having less time with no particular differences between any of the groups. More agreement was shown for question 14 than the previous, with 44% of lower level students not reading because of a lack of interest. This figure went down to 35% for the mid-level and 18% for the higher level groups. For question 15, unsurprisingly, the level of agreement rose depending on level for agreement to not reading in English because of the perception it is too difficult. Only 40% of the higher group had some form of agreement with that, and 42% for the mid-level group, but for the majority at 69%, the lower level group agreed that they did not read due to perceived difficulty. The final question related to a reason for not reading in English about not being able to find something good to read. The majority in all groups disagreed with this statement, but interestingly, 33% of the lower group

Table 5. Student *Dislikes about Reading in English for Three Levels of Proficiency*

| | | Lower Level | Mid-Level | Higher Level |
|--|---------------------|-------------|-----------|--------------|
| Don't read English because no time (13) | Completely Disagree | 6% | 12% | 6% |
| | Slightly Disagree | 25% | 15% | 19% |
| | Somewhat Agree | 42% | 44% | 55% |
| | Completely Agree | 27% | 29% | 20% |
| Don't read English because not interested (14) | Completely Disagree | 17% | 21% | 27% |
| | Slightly Disagree | 39% | 44% | 55% |
| | Somewhat Agree | 28% | 26% | 15% |
| | Completely Agree | 16% | 9% | 3% |
| Don't read English because too difficult (15) | Completely Disagree | 7% | 14% | 14% |
| | Slightly Disagree | 24% | 44% | 46% |
| | Somewhat Agree | 49% | 27% | 37% |
| | Completely Agree | 20% | 15% | 3% |
| Don't read English because can't find what's good to read (16) | Completely Disagree | 19% | 38% | 30% |
| | Slightly Disagree | 48% | 47% | 66% |
| | Somewhat Agree | 24% | 12% | 3% |
| | Completely Agree | 9% | 3% | 1% |

agreed, and that percentage went down as the reading proficiency increased, so the mid-level group was 15% and that had dropped to 4% for the higher level group.

Following up on previous research dealing with what demotivates students about reading extensively, Takase (2003) found that some of the major hurdles were related to the materials being too long, difficult, and shallow in nature. Plus, after each book, students would be required to write a summary, which they found too time-consuming and demotivating. Takase concludes that it is necessary to provide an abundance of easy, high-interest, reading material for less motivated students, and to reduce the requirement of written summaries, which could lead to spending more time reading. On the ITM course, some kind of evidence of reading is required to show the books has been finished, otherwise, from personal experience, opportunities for students to abuse the system arise. Instead of summaries, however, there are other more creative ways that could fit the students to follow-up after extensive reading (ERF, 2018).

Conclusion

This small scale research is part of wider research into quality control of the ITM classes and curriculum in general. This time focused on reading, and based on the results, some general observations can be made. Firstly, it is important to maintain differences in instruction at varying degrees of proficiency of reading. Lower level students will suffer both from higher levels of demotivation towards reading as well as a lack of positive reading experiences. Secondly, it is important at any level to bring students into contact with large amounts of high interest readings on a variety of reading topics. In this respect, extensive reading is a useful activity for students.

The other focus of the study was the speed reading course. Generally, feedback about the course was positive at all levels of proficiency. The topics were also interesting, with students having some level of familiarity with them. Whatever the reading activity, it is clear that reading teachers in the ITM must expose students to positive reading experiences and help them see the benefits of reading in English both for enjoyment and their future careers.

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Appendix A

Speed Reading and Reading Habits survey

1. What kind of things do you usually read in Japanese?

Newspapers ____ magazines ____ comics / manga ____ non-fiction ____
 novels ____ Other _____ (indicate) I don't read in Japanese

2. What kind of things do you usually read in English? Choose the one which applies the most.

Newspapers ____ magazines ____ comics / manga ____ non-fiction ____
 novels ____ Other _____ (indicate) I don't read in Japanese

For items 3 to 16, state your level of agreement.

| | |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| Completely disagree | Slightly disagree |
| Somewhat agree | Completely Agree |

Attitudes about Speed Reading Course

3. I think this speed reading course has made me read faster
4. I think this speed reading course has made me understand reading better
5. I enjoyed the topics that I read about
6. The reading material was quite easy
7. The speed reading activities at university are more useful than those from high school

Habits of Reading English

8. I often read things in English, not my textbook, for pleasure
9. I often read and try English TOEIC reading practice by myself
10. I read graded readers when not being asked to do for homework

Beliefs about Reading English

11. I believe that reading English can improve my overall English ability
12. I believe that reading English well can support my future career

Reasons for not liking Reading English

13. I usually don't read in English because I have no time
14. I usually don't read in English because I don't like it / not interested
15. I usually don't read in English because it's too difficult
16. I usually don't read in English because I can't find what is good to read

国際観光学部2年生英語カリキュラム用の リディング活動に対しての学生評価への調査

ロブソン・グライアム

[要約]

今年度は国際観光学部の新学部を迎えます。学部化と同時に学部での英語カリキュラムが変わりました。組織的な新カリキュラム評価の一部としましては秋学期から新しいリディングクラスの中で“スピードリディング”コースを履修した2年生(n=201)に対してそのコースの評価しました。スピードリディングとは語彙と文法をより易しく作られた教材であり、学生の読む目的は総合的な理解を維持しながら出来るだけ早く読むことです。スピードリディングコースに対しての評価とほかの英語での学生リディング習慣等も図れる機会になりました。